How to Play Guitar Tablature – Part 1

Guitar tablature is a system of notation that graphically represents music by showing you the strings and frets that are to be played. It also can show some degree of "feel" or technique with slides, hammer-ons, pull-offs, slurs, vibrato, etc.

Since tablature is somewhat of a shortcut system there are not a lot of official rules to this notation. In fact, transcriptions vary from tab to tab as one transcriber may illustrate something differently than another.

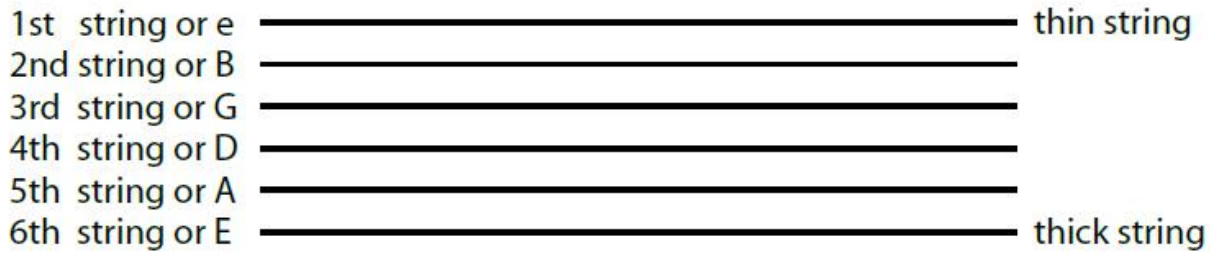
That being said, I'm going to try to be as thorough as possible regarding the subject so that you have a good grasp of how to interpret it. A note is represented by placing a number (which indicates the fret to play), on the appropriate string.

One thing that tablature does not illustrate is the duration of notes. It does not tell you how long a note should be held out. Sometimes tab transcribers will specifically put longer spaces between notes on the line to denote duration, but it's not quantifiable; it is simply a basic idea.

That being said, most people don't use tablature unless it's a song that they already know and can hum, so that part becomes less of an issue, except with more intricate parts.

Also, even though tablature has been around for centuries, some of the techniques used by rock/pop guitar players are fairly new.

In tablature, each line represents a string on the guitar. The thickest string is the bottom line and the thinnest string is the top line. So basically, it's the opposite of the way that you think it might be. One way to remember this is to think of the **higher lines as the higher pitched strings and the lower lines as the lower pitched strings.**

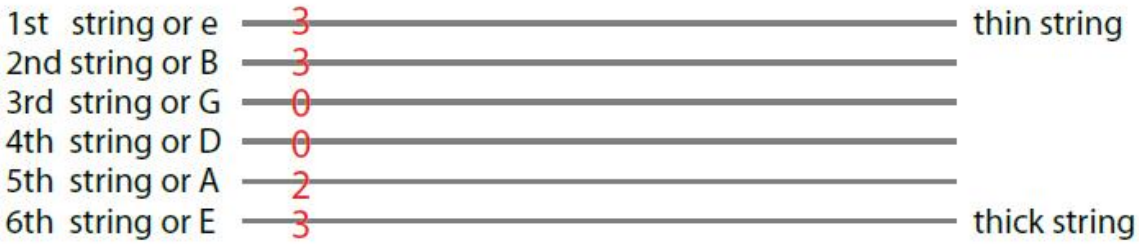


The numbers placed on those lines represent the frets, NOT which finger is used. Tablature does NOT tell you what fingers to use. That is where a good guitar instructor or proper technique

comes in handy!

When numbers are placed vertically like below, you will play them like a chord (all at once), as in a strum.

Below is a G major chord. (By the way, tablature notation is typically plain black and white - I've merely added the red to help you zero in on what I'm referring to)



Part 2 of this section can be found later in the book. For now, you will only need to understand the principles in Part 1.